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## NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

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AMERICANISM: WHAT IS IT? By David Jayne Hill. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1916.

It is an extremely simple setting forth of fundamental ideas that Dr. Hill has given us in his little book about the true nature of Americanism. The volume has, in fact, the merits of a good textbook—plainness, a methodical treatment, an avoidance of obscuring side-issues. But if Dr. Hill's treatise is elementary enough to prompt the thought that it might be studied with profit by high-school students or young men in college, it is by the same token profound enough to claim the attention of every thoughtful citizen of the United States. The usefulness of such a book is obvious. This is a time of unformulated or ill-formulated discontent, of questionings concerning laws and institutions, of distrust of principles. The disposition is to adopt a wholly pragmatic attitude—to experiment and to place trust in what for the time seems to "work." The danger, indeed, is not that men tend to think "progressively," to experiment, to innovate, but that in so doing they may sacrifice the truth that has already been achieved. It is to the truth that we have achieved and put into practice here in America—to American democracy as the best solution that the human mind has ever reached of the problem of government *vs.* liberty—that Dr. Hill forcibly recalls our minds. So clearly has he defined the essential principles of Americanism, so ably does he defend them from the usual sort of attack, that even the radically minded reader, though he may be unwilling to believe that in theory democracy represents the final stage in the application of reason and ethics to government, is fairly forced to admit that not in subversive experiment but in the working out of democracy to its complete fulfillment lies our salvation.

May there be a further stage in the evolution of government? Will it ever be possible to write into the fundamental law of the land more of the moral law than is embodied in "equality?" In short, will anything like a Socialistic state ever be realized? These are questions upon the consideration of which Dr. Hill in this book hardly enters. To answer them fully is not his present business. It is from the obvious rightness of the "American idea" that he

argues—the idea that “there are certain rights and liberties which should *never* be subject to abridgement by law, and that encroachments upon these rights and liberties by a portion—even by a majority—of the people, or by any government they might establish, should be, through a superior and permanent law, declared illegal.” If anything may be clearly seen from a study of history, or of the present state of the world, it is that right and reason—not the arbitrary will of any majority or of any government—are the guides to the happiness and prosperity of a people. We as a people have bound ourselves in a peculiar way to observe the moral law, or a part of it, and few of us when the question is squarely put to us, will profess ourselves willing that the obligation should be abolished or relaxed.

It may be that in taking his stand firmly, as he does, upon the ground of “natural” or “inherent” rights, Dr. Hill may lay himself open in the minds of some readers to the charge of dogmatism. There is, in truth, opportunity for the expenditure of much subtlety upon the meaning of these expressions. The evolutionary view, moreover, seems, as usual, to open a way for further speculative advance, to leave an opportunity for the constructors of Utopias. The truth is, however, that the application of “Darwinism” to life is a somewhat uncertain venture. Evolution explains much, but when we endeavor consciously to live by it we are liable to go astray. It would seem that we best co-operate with the Divine plan, not by endeavoring to anticipate it—not by doing wrong that good may come—but simply by trying to do right. Now the strength of Dr. Hill’s reasoning consists not in a philosophic analysis of rights but in a convincing proof that anti-constitutional proposals involve the violation or weakening of that right and reason which we have already established: all aim at substituting the absolutism of a majority, or of a government, for the principle of justice as formulated in the idea of inherent rights. Opposition to the American idea is, to be sure, rather vague, but it is not on that account harmless, though it may be well-meaning. Lack of a principle may be as fatal as want of principles—confused thought as injurious as unwillingness to abide by the truth. Rights formerly held to be inalienable are now being called into question—the right, for example, to transmit property by inheritance, and the right of the individual to possess more than a certain limited amount of wealth. But “no one has ventured to draw the line at a definite point either as respects possession or inheritance; or indicated any principle upon which the line could be drawn, where it should begin, or where it should end. The one thing most certain is that it would not end where it began.”

It becomes apparent that democracy, the American idea, furnishes us with a moral and practical standard and test—as other theories, or half-theories, do not. It also gives us something to fight for—something quite as definite, quite as easy for a plain man to

grasp and hold by, as the idea of a quasi-personal state. Just how thought that is truly democratic "works," may be well seen in Dr. Hill's exposition of the truth that a state must defend its citizens. "If natural rights do not exist," he pointedly asks, "if rights are what the majority pleases to make them, without restriction, why may not a few unfortunate citizens be consistently sacrificed for the good of the country? Why should the contented and prosperous people of the United States—a hundred millions of them—be menaced with the risks and costs of war in defending the alleged rights of a paltry hundred American men, women, and little children, shot through and blown to fragments, or drowned without even an attempt at rescue, when innocently sailing upon the high seas on a non-combatant vessel?"

But the ideal of democracy is not merely national in scope; it is, or may become, cosmopolitan. In aiming at world-peace through nationality—and certainly peace will never come through an attempt to disregard nationality—every one inevitably looks in the direction of democracy, of the American idea. The present time, when imperialism, the antithesis of democracy, is in one form or another so destructively rampant in the world, seems a poor time in which to talk of subverting or weakening the American principle.

Dr. Hill's logic appears unanswerable; his exhortations direct us not indeed toward the immediate realization of the millenium, but toward such action as will lead toward the most widespread and the most attainable good. The way of democracy is the way of justice, and perhaps the way of evolution as well. One lays down the book with the feeling that if we may ever rightly acquiesce in the modification of the American idea in the interests of a supposedly higher truth, this truth must be taught us in a new fashion and by a higher authority than we have yet recognized.

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A DIPLOMAT'S WIFE IN MEXICO. By Edith O'Shaughnessy. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1916.

There are two ways of studying a human situation: you may content yourself with an investigation of facts and figures and inter-relations, or you may make yourself a part of the situation itself, put yourself in the place of the various actors in it and try to feel with them. It is usually only in this latter way that the fullest sense of conviction is reached. The bare facts of a situation need to be clothed with feeling—the flesh and blood of experience—before seeming natural and real. We may read of monstrosities and atrocities, of beauties and heroisms, without being much moved—that is to say without being really convinced; for conviction is something that produces action or a tendency toward it. It is not that we are, or ought to be, swayed by appeals to passions or prejudice, but that we